

A simple guide to sustainable printing

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1 Choose sustainable paper

- Recycled paper: Made from paper that's already been used
- Virgin paper from sustainable sources (FSC, PEFC, or other certification) comes from responsibly and sustainably managed forests
- Carbon-balanced paper: Helps offset the carbon emissions from paper production
- **Tip:** Recycled paper is excellent, but sometimes virgin paper uses less energy. Paper is made from natural, renewable, and recyclable materials, so check what works best for your project

2 Pick eco-friendly inks

- Vegetable or soy-based inks: Kinder to the planet and easier to recycle
- Skip metallic and UV coatings – they can enhance the look and feel, but can stop paper from being recycled

3 Print smart

- Print double-sided – cuts paper consumption in half
- Optimise layouts – e.g., A3 folded to A4 gives more space for your message than an A4+A5, without using more paper
- Avoid big, ink-heavy designs – use contrast and visuals to grab attention instead

4 Partner with sustainable printers

- Check for ISO 14001 certification
- Ask if they are a carbon-neutral or positive business
- Ask if they have additional accreditations such as B Corp status, or have an Ecovadis rating
- Review their waste and recycling policies – do these align?

5 Be smart with targeting

- Use data to send print only to the right audience
- Segment your audience – smaller, more relevant brochures get read
- Insist on a PDF proof to approve before printing

6 Rethink the reply envelope

- For charities: Could the envelope be incorporated into a leaflet to save paper and processes?
- As some audiences will more likely respond online, skipping it can save print, postage, and admin costs
- Encourage online response with QR codes and easy links

7 Easier recycling

- Avoid or reduce lamination or other finishes where possible, making the paper more easily recycled. (However, additional finishes may also help prolong the life of the product)
- Remove staples or bindings before recycling
- Encourage reuse – can your print live on as something else?

8 Shipping and distribution impacts

- Consider the entire journey of your print: sourcing, production, distribution, and disposal
- Choose suppliers with sustainability certifications across the supply chain
- Print closer to where materials will be distributed to reduce transport emissions

9 Plan print volumes carefully

- Avoid over-ordering by using past data or testing smaller runs
- Print-on-demand is ideal for small or niche campaigns
- Leave time in your schedule for feedback to reduce the risk of reprints

10 Understand print vs digital

- Digital isn't necessarily more sustainable — weigh up the carbon footprint of both
- Printing can be more effective and stays in the home for longer
- Use print and digital together strategically for best results

11 Tell them it's sustainable

- Include logos or statements that show your materials are sustainable (e.g. FSC, PEFC, Carbon Balanced, etc)
- Let people know why you made sustainable choices — it builds trust
- Tools such as PrintGreen (printgreen.org) allow to brands to make print and mail campaigns more sustainable through carbon calculator tools and best practice guidance

12 Test new materials

- Trial uncoated stocks as an alternative to coated, where appropriate
- Trial new paper stocks and inks to ensure they look and feel right before you go to print at volume
- Ask your printer to help you test before committing to a large run
- Start small and build confidence in more sustainable formats